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Forty-eighth session

REPORT OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE (9 - 10 September and 8 October 1997)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Björn Skogmo (Norway), who chaired agenda items 1 - 7 which were considered on 8 and 9 September 1997. The Executive Committee Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Ali Mchumo (United Republic of Tanzania) chaired items 8 - 11 which were considered by the Standing Committee on 8 October 1997.

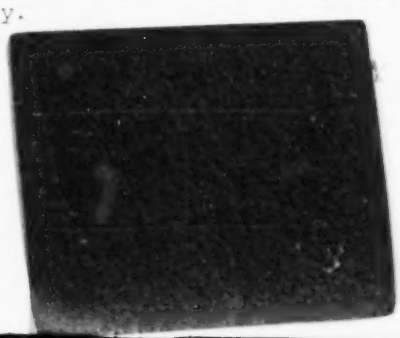
II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE NINTH MEETING AND THE REPORT OF THE EIGHTH MEETING

2. The *Provisional Annotated Agenda* (EC/47/SC/CRP.41) and the *Draft Report of the Eighth Meeting of the Standing Committee* (EC/47/SC/CRP.40) were both adopted without amendment.

III. SITUATION REPORTS

A. Oral Update on the Great Lakes Region of Africa

3. In providing an oral update on the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Assistant High Commissioner focused on an overview of developments since June 1997. He also advised delegations that the High Commissioner was in New York and would be informing the Security Council that developments in Democratic Republic of the Congo had forced UNHCR to suspend activities on behalf of Rwandan refugees in that country.



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4. The Director of the Great Lakes Operation reinforced the Assistant High Commissioner's comments on the gravity of the situation in regard to Rwandan refugees in Democratic Republic of the Congo and noted that there were also other caseloads in that country under UNHCR's protection.

5. Delegations taking the floor expressed concern over recent events in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Several said that they found the recent expulsions "unacceptable" and that their Governments were in full support of the High Commissioner's decision.

6. At the request of one delegation, the Director of the Division of International Protection clarified the legal grounds for exclusion. In replying to a question from a delegation, the Assistant High Commissioner said that the Office has been coordinating with the OAU on the screening/expulsions issues and maintains constant contact with Secretary-General of the OAU.

B. The Americas and the Caribbean

7. Introducing the Update on *Regional Developments in the Americas* (EC/47/SC/CRP.43), the Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas briefed delegations on the latest developments in the region, focusing on the latest positive developments in respect of durable solutions for Guatemalan refugees in both Mexico and Guatemala. The Director also drew the attention of the meeting to the situation of Colombia, where internal displacement continues on a large scale with small outflows into neighbouring countries.

8. Many member and observer delegations referred to the issue of internal displacement in Colombia, expressing concern over the situation. A number of delegations voiced support for the Government's request for a UNHCR presence in the country, with delegations stressing the need for a common approach with other United Nations bodies and other international actors, such as the ICRC, in the event of UNHCR's involvement. A number of speakers advised caution given the complexity of the situation. The State responsibility in this matter was also underlined by delegations. Reference was made to the need to strengthen asylum and to adopt a comprehensive regional approach. One delegation called for a dialogue on the situation in Colombia within the Executive Committee and stressed the need to define the roles of the various agencies. The same delegation also referred to the need to bring the matter to the attention of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), with the aim of producing a coherent and system-wide approach. One delegation stated that the total number of internally displaced in Colombia was considerably lower than the number cited at the meeting. In response to the comments of delegations, the Director stated that the High Commissioner was pursuing a cautious approach and was engaged in a consultative process with key partners and concerned donors and countries in the region, with a view to determining UNHCR's response.

9. The positive developments in Guatemala and Mexico were welcomed by several delegations, who reiterated their support for UNHCR's efforts to achieve definitive solutions for Guatemalan refugees. The "migratory stabilization plan", adopted by Mexico for Guatemalan refugees, was the subject of commendation by several delegations. Two delegations announced financial contributions to UNHCR's repatriation and reintegration programme.

One delegation recalled the difficulties of the repatriation process and the efforts made over the years, also in financial terms, to facilitate the acquisition of land for the returnees. Reference was also made by delegations to the recent developments aimed at accelerating repatriation.

10. Two delegations intervened in connection with paragraph 111 of the Update. One delegation clarified that the United States and Cuba had engaged in talks in December 1996 concerning issues arising out of the implementation of the existing bilateral migration accords and did not enter into a new agreement at that time. An Observer delegation strongly emphasized that UNHCR is not party to these purely bilateral migration accords and that it therefore has no role to play in connection with the said accords. The same Observer delegation stressed that these accords fall outside UNHCR's mandate.

11. One delegation welcomed UNHCR's efforts to link its work with regional organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) in promoting respect for international refugee and human rights principles. The same delegation also expressed appreciation for UNHCR's participation in the regional dialogue on migration.

12. Two speakers expressed the wish that the documentation for the Standing Committee meetings be also produced in Spanish. Clarification on this issue was given by the Secretary of the Committee.

C. Asia and the Pacific

13. The Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific introduced the *Update on Regional Developments in Asia and the Pacific* (EC/47/SC/CRP.44), highlighting the situation in Cambodia and providing delegations with information on other recent developments in the region.

14. One delegation indicated that despite concerns over possible adverse social and environmental consequences, temporary asylum and assistance for Cambodians would continue to be provided until circumstances permitted their return. A number of delegations commended the continuing generous asylum policies for newly arrived Cambodians and ethnic minorities from Myanmar.

15. Several delegations expressed concern over the halt in repatriation of Myanmar refugees from Bangladesh and urged the concerned Governments to cooperate with UNHCR to find timely solutions for the remaining caseload. One delegation called for an evaluation of the effectiveness of UNHCR's returnee programme in Myanmar. Several delegates encouraged UNHCR to take care to remain within its mandate and to continue to seek the involvement of longer-term development oriented agencies in Myanmar. Another delegation hoped that the repatriation of Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh would be completed soon, but wondered why alternative solutions, including third country resettlement, had not been considered by UNHCR.

16. Satisfaction with the conclusion of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was expressed and regional initiatives aimed at generating dialogue and information sharing within the region concerning refugees, displacement and migration were welcomed. A delegation, however, cautioned that UNHCR's monitoring and assistance to returning Vietnamese and Laotians should not be phased down too early. It was also noted that 290,000 Vietnamese refugees continue to be hosted by China, and that several thousand have expressed a

desire to return to Viet Nam. UNHCR was encouraged to play a positive role in this respect, which would thereafter lead to the integration and naturalization of those wishing to remain in China. It was also noted that the remaining 1000 Vietnamese refugees and 700 boat people in Hong Kong should be resettled and repatriated, respectively. A request was made that future UNHCR documentation not refer to Hong Kong as separate from China.

17. One delegation questioned whether in the absence of any repatriation to Sri Lanka UNHCR should consider short-term disengagement. Further, another delegation expressed the understanding that ICRC was the lead agency for internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka and asked for an explanation of UNHCR's plans for coordination with ICRC. One delegation expressed satisfaction with UNHCR's focus on durable solutions for internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka, noting that this contributed significantly to the stabilization of populations at risk and avoided larger potential outflows to India.

IV. PROGRAMME POLICY ISSUES

18. Under this agenda item, the Committee considered *A Progress Report on Refugee Women and UNHCR's Framework for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* (EC/47/SC/CRP.45) and an update on *Refugee Health and Nutrition* (EC/47/SC/CRP.46). The Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women introduced the first of these conference room papers, followed by an introduction to the second conference room paper by the Senior Epidemiologist.

19. During the discussions on the *Progress Report on Refugee Women and UNHCR's Framework for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*, considerable interest was voiced and more details of country activities implementing the Beijing Platform for Action were requested. One delegation recommended that UNHCR take a more rigorous approach to establishing benchmarks for reaching goals in respect to refugee women. There was also a request for an evaluation of initiatives in respect to refugee women.

20. Interest was expressed for the follow-up of UNHCR's proposal to introduce gender related protocols to memoranda of understanding (MOU) with other agencies. Delegations were reassured by the Senior Coordinator that UNHCR was working on this follow-up with the other agencies. One delegation raised concern over some of the activities of the peace-keeping forces, especially with regard to women and children in Somalia and in other regions. Refugee women's role in peace building and participation in the political processes leading to negotiations for peace was raised as a matter for further attention. The Senior Coordinator, in response, noted that UNHCR is working in several countries, such as Guatemala, Uganda, Kenya, Bosnia and Rwanda, to promote peace education, training for peaceful means of conflict resolution and peace building activities. Further, she informed delegations that in November 1997, an interagency workshop will be held in Addis Ababa to document the best practices of women in peace building.

21. With regard to the conference room paper on refugee health and nutrition, delegations were supportive of UNHCR's strategies and the conceptual framework designed to ensure timely health and nutrition interventions from the initial emergency phase of an operation through to

final rehabilitation in the country of origin. Several delegations underlined the importance of UNHCR's role in ensuring coordination and complementarity with other agencies, and called for continued support to UNHCR in its efforts to control malnutrition and communicable diseases. UNHCR was encouraged to pursue its activities in the areas of reproductive health, with due respect for the cultural, religious and moral values of the various refugee groups. There was also a request that UNHCR maintain the position of Reproductive Health Officer for a further period of one year, to ensure full mainstreaming of this priority concern in UNHCR programmes. UNHCR's capacity-building strategies in favour of refugees and local counterparts were also welcomed.

V. COORDINATION ISSUES

A. Memoranda of Understanding

22. The Director of the Division of Operational Support (DOS) introduced the conference room paper EC/47/SC/CRP.51 on Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). In his opening remarks, the Director indicated that the priorities in designing MOUs are to indicate clearly where responsibilities between agencies lie, to avoid duplication and gaps, and to support the comparative advantages of each agency. The Director noted that MOUs were not an end in themselves, and that the practical effectiveness of their implementation would continued to be monitored by both parties.

23. The representative of WFP then took the floor and outlined the principal new or revised elements in the March 1997 revision of the MOU between UNHCR and WFP, and the measures taken by both organizations to assist their field offices in implementing its provisions.

24. A number of delegations requested further information on cooperation with other organizations, in particular, UNHCHR, the World Bank, ITU and DHA, and requested clarifications on the division of responsibilities and coordination arrangements.

25. In responding, the Director noted that the focus of the conference room paper had been limited, and that the next periodic review would take a broader view. The Chairman suggested that in due course a further assessment of the arrangements described in the conference room paper would be of use to the Standing Committee.

B. Relations with Non-governmental Organizations

26. Under this sub-item, the Standing Committee had before it three documents for discussion: *Execution of Humanitarian Assistance through Implementing Partners: A Joint Inspection Unit Report* (EC/47/SC/CRP.42); *Implementing Partners* (EC/47/SC/CRP.48); and a *Report on UNHCR's Relations with Non-Governmental Organizations (PARinAC)* (EC/47/SC/CRP.52). They were introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support, the Controller and Director of Financial and Information Services, and the NGO Coordinator, respectively.

27. Delegations expressed satisfaction with all three reports. The first of these reports, EC/47/SC/CRP.42, reproduced five recommendations extracted

from the Joint Inspection Unit Report, which were used as a reference for the discussions of the other two reports presented under this sub-item.

28. Delegations welcomed UNHCR's efforts to improve oversight of expenditures incurred by implementing partners, as set out in EC/47/SC/CRP.48. In introducing this conference room paper, the Controller explained the rationale for adopting different approaches for different categories of implementing partners. One delegation indicated the need to include an evaluation process within a project cycle to enhance the individual capacities and accountabilities of each implementing partner. Several delegations enquired about UNHCR's proposals with regard to audit certification, in particular the introduction of the proposed threshold of $ 100,000, below which audit certificates would not be mandatory. The Controller assured them that this would not represent a reduction in the level of control exercised by the Office, and further clarified that the threshold would be applied to the totality of activities of an implementing partner in a given country.

29. In discussion of EC/47/SC/CRP.52, speakers generally supported UNHCR's priority plan of action in regard to NGOs and expressed continued support for the PARinAC process. UNHCR was requested to ensure that international NGOs worked with the Office on capacity-building of national NGOs, considered an important issue, as was the proposed Operational Partnership Agreement.

VI. REPORTS RELATING TO OVERSIGHT

30. Two evaluation summaries were considered under this agenda item: *Staff Stress and Security: a Management Challenge for UNHCR* (EC/47/SC/CRP.49); and an *Evaluation of UNHCR's Efforts on Behalf of Children and Adolescents* (EC/47/SC/CRP.50). The annual report on *Inspection and Evaluation Activities* (A/AC.96/886) was also before the Standing Committee for preliminary consideration. The summaries were introduced by the Director of the Inspection and Evaluation Service, who assured the Committee that it would continue to receive detailed, frank summaries of evaluation studies on a regular basis.

31. In respect to the summary of the report on staff stress and security, delegations were broadly supportive, welcoming, in particular, the frankness of the summary. A number of delegations paid tribute to the personal sacrifice made by humanitarian staff world-wide working in increasingly stressful and dangerous environments. One delegation specifically referred to the need to ensure that no effort be spared in bringing to justice those responsible for the deaths of humanitarian workers. Support was expressed for the need to make counsellors available to humanitarian workers in difficult and dangerous duty stations. In responding to a reference made to the 1994 Convention on the Safety and Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel and the scope of its coverage of humanitarian workers, the Director of the Division of Human Resources (DHRM) informed delegations that UNHCR staff were not adequately covered under this convention.

32. There was broad recognition among delegations that the management of staff stress and security is a costly matter, and a proposal was made for costs to be appropriately reflected in funding appeals. Emphasis was given to the international community's shared responsibility to support and protect humanitarian workers in the field, as well as the funding implications, and

ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation and coordination in this regard between international and non-governmental organizations were encouraged. An update on interagency cooperation on staff security was called for, in addition to a plan of action and comprehensive guidelines on staff security. In this regard, an invitation was extended to UNHCR to a seminar on staff stress and security to be held in Geneva in early 1998. The issue of leadership was also raised as a critical factor in the effective management of staff stress and security in a high risk working environment, which highlighted the need for training in stress management and the need to address the stress experienced by the families of staff members who are based in non-family duty stations.

33. Delegations strongly endorsed recommendations of the evaluation of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities on behalf of children and adolescents, conducted jointly by UNHCR and the International Save the Children Alliance. They emphasized that the greatest importance should be placed on the protection of minors, noting with concern a number of key issues specific to this age group, including under-aged military recruitment, sexual violence and exploitation, separation from families, and inadequate access to education, birth registration and other essential services. Several delegations stressed the need for close coordination and collaboration with other relevant agencies, including UNICEF and human rights bodies. Delegations welcomed initiatives for a multi-year plan of action and requested that further details be presented at the next meeting of the Standing Committee. The proposal that the Executive Committee adopt a conclusion on the protection of refugee children and adolescents was also welcomed.

34. Responding to delegations' comments, the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children emphasised the importance UNHCR places on interagency coordination and collaboration, outlining a broad range of current and proposed collaborative activities with a number of relevant organizations. He also mentioned other current initiatives to enhance the ways UNHCR protects and assists minors, including through improvements in staffing and training. Finally, he noted that the evaluation's recommendations would form the blueprint for enhancing the mainstreaming into UNHCR operations of issues relating to protection and assistance of minors.

VII. PROTECTION ISSUES

35. The Division of International Protection made available copies of the Resettlement Handbook to all delegations and introduced EC/47/SC/CRP.47. Delegations welcomed the issuance of the Resettlement Handbook as a key reference and a training tool, which defines the objectives, criteria and procedures for UNHCR resettlement activities, and also includes Country Chapters explaining the policies and practices of resettlement countries. Several delegations also confirmed the continuation of their resettlement programmes and agreed to maintain close working relations with the UNHCR Resettlement and Special Cases Section.

VIII. PROGRAMME AND FUNDING MATTERS

A. Programmes and Funding

36. This agenda item was introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support. He began with a review of the relevant documentation (A/AC.96/884/Add.1-4).

37. With regard to the revised 1997 General Programmes budget, which remains at the approved level of $ 452,612,000, he pointed out that there were significant problems in funding this amount, and indicated that the Office had taken a number of measures to make sure that UNHCR's programme implementation matched the available resources. This funding problem in 1997, he noted, would also have implications (in terms of the level of carry-over, secondary income) for the 1998 General Programmes.

38. The General Programmes target for 1998 had been set at a reduced level of $ 440 million, in spite of the expressed desire of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/860, para. 22 refers) to increase the volume of statutory activities covered by General Programmes. The Director recalled the consultations that had taken place to arrive at this level, especially those at the eighth meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/47/SC/CRP.34 and A/AC.96/888 refer). At that time, it was pointed out that the funding of even this reduced General Programme target level would require contributions at least comparable to those of 1996. The components of the General Programmes target (programmed activities, Programme Reserve, Emergency Fund, Voluntary Repatriation Fund) were then reviewed; where the High Commissioner had some discretion over the amounts of these various components, she had chosen to propose for approval the minimum amount. The Director also pointed out that UNHCR was again proposing that an amount up to $ 500,000 be approved for transfer from the 1998 Programme Reserve to the International Field Staff Housing and Basic Amenities Fund.

39. The current funding trends were reviewed by the Head of the Funding and Donor Relations Service (FDRS). He indicated that as of 7 October 1997, total pledges to UNHCR since 1 January 1997 for General Programmes amounted to $ 273 million. He pointed out that this situation represented a negative trend which could be attributed to a combination of declining donations and the impact of the strong US dollar, and stated that UNHCR was carefully revising its rates of programme implementation to align them with likely income. It was stressed, however, that UNHCR still needed some $ 50-60 million before 31 December 1997.

40. As regards Special Programmes, the Head of FDRS informed delegations that donors have contributed $ 379 million since 1 January 1997. He indicated that UNHCR was particularly concerned that its repatriation programmes, both ongoing or about to begin, be adequately funded. The needs for programmes to Mali, Liberia, Tajikistan and Angola were especially highlighted. In addition, he underlined the importance of fully financing operations in former Yugoslavia and the CIS countries.

41. In summing up the 1997 funding situation, the Head of FDRS said that UNHCR had received $ 652 million, for both General and Special Programmes,

since 1 January 1997, informing delegations that, by way of comparison, by 1 October 1996, UNHCR had received $ 785 million.

42. As regards the 1998 General Programmes target of $ 440 million, the Head of FDRS indicated that the Office would carefully monitor the funding prospects during the course of next year and draw the necessary conclusions when it comes to the rate of implementation. The need to provide the High Commissioner with the financial stability and predictability that her core programmes required was stressed. For 1998 Special Programmes, he stated that the initial revised budget projections stood at $ 551 million (EC/47/SC/INF.1 refers), indicating that this amount included several large operational budgets which were still under review, and did not include budget estimates for Western Sahara, which were currently being reviewed. General and Special Programmes needs for 1998 thus amounted to $995.9 million. Donor governments were urged to make every effort to finance these levels of activities, already reduced from previous years. At the same time, he made mention of UNHCR's continued efforts to broaden its donor base.

43. In responding to these presentations, a number of delegations expressed concern with the funding trends, especially under General Programmes. One delegation, supported by others, called for a review before the next Standing Committee of how to establish a stronger donor base for General Programmes and to explore ways to move statutory activities currently funded under Special Programmes to General Programmes. One delegation expressed concern about the proposed level of the 1998 General Programmes target in the light of funding trends. The same delegation also felt that UNHCR needed to review its operational involvement in situations, particularly in repatriation movements which were at a standstill.

44. A number of delegations drew attention to a range of ACABQ observations relevant to this agenda item. One delegation felt that UNHCR should make a better effort to explain to the ACABQ the background and context of its programmes and operations.

45. In summing up the debate, the Chairman noted the broad support of delegations for the relevant budgetary and funding elements of the draft decision on Administrative and Financial Matters.

B. Programme Delivery and Administrative Support

46. The documentation on this agenda item (EC/47/SC/CRP.53) and the relevant sections of the ACABQ Report (A/AC.96/884/Add.3, paras. 25-29) were introduced by the Director of the Division of Operational Support. He referred to the decision of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/878, para. 25 (f)), arising out of comments of the ACABQ, on increases in the combined levels of programme delivery (PD) and administrative support (AS) costs and the need to review and define these categories of costs/posts more precisely and in a standardized manner. He further recalled the origins of the current definitions and stressed that new definitions should properly reflect UNHCR's activities and the various types of support costs. He also said that once the scope of overheads/support costs had been clearly defined, these needed to be rigorously controlled. He suggested that one way forward in this regard, as recognized by the ACABQ, was to look at the work of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF on the harmonization of budget presentations, which also

entailed the use of clear, standardized definitions of overhead/support costs.

47. The Director drew attention to the recommendation of the ACABQ in this regard. He proposed to the meeting that UNHCR would prepare a conference room paper on the issue and present it to the Standing Committee in the first half of 1998. In the light of the Standing Committee's comments on this paper, a further proposal would be presented to the Executive Committee (together with the comments of the ACABQ) at its annual session in 1998. If approved, UNHCR would reflect the new definitions in a new budget presentation effective from the year 2000, which would be submitted to the Executive Committee in 1999. He indicated that this time-table would not only allow the necessary review of the proposed new structure by the Executive Committee and the ACABQ, but would also allow UNHCR to coordinate this initiative with developments under Project Delphi related to a revised Operations Management System, including an integrated budget and finance system. Such a new budget system, he stated, would have to safeguard the necessary flexibility that UNHCR requires to respond promptly to refugee emergencies.

48. Delegations, in commenting on this agenda item, broadly supported the proposals as presented. They felt that they would lead to greater transparency and comparability in relation to overhead costs. Some stressed, however, that the particular nature of the work of UNHCR must be recognized, indicating that this should not be a question of enforcing harmonization, or pursuing harmonization only for its own sake. Another delegation underlined the need for UNHCR to build on the work already done, and once having adopted definitions to stay with them, so as to enable meaningful comparisons of overhead costs over a period of time. Another delegation pointed out that the emphasis in programming and related budgets should be on results/outputs and less on inputs.

IX. FINANCIAL MATTERS

49. The Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Information introduced the agenda item, noting that the accounts conformed to previous audit recommendations. The Controller drew the attention of the Committee to the audit opinion on page 36 of the *Report of the Board of Auditors* (A/AC.96/885), which was, in effect, the audit certificate for UNHCR, showing that the financial statements contained in the annual accounts for 1996 (A/AC.96/883) fairly reflect the financial position of the Office. He also pointed out that Addendum 1 to document A/AC.96/885 gave UNHCR's response to the Board of Auditors' recommendations.

50. The Controller emphasized that the issue of audit certificates, and in particular, UNHCR's proposal to provide different requirements for international and local NGOs, Governments and international agencies, had been discussed both by the Standing Committee and ACABQ. He referred to the proposal to introduce a threshold of $ 100,000 below which the audit certification requirement would not be strictly applied. The Controller hoped that he could count on the support of the Standing Committee for this course of action, so that the new procedures could be introduced on 1 January 1998. UNHCR would then report on progress during the year.

51. In commenting on this agenda item several delegations expressed their appreciation for UNHCR's diligence in responding to the concerns of the Board of Auditors and the ACABQ. Several delegations pointed to the recommendations on consultants and asked for clarification regarding UNHCR's use of consultancies in a period of downsizing. Concerns were also raised regarding the recommendations on project monitoring and objective setting, particularly as relates to the current focus on input rather than outputs. It was expected that this matter would be addressed as part of the development of the Operations Management System. Some delegations queried the audit coverage of UNHCR and the role of internal audit.

52. In his response the Controller pointed to the recent Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of Internal Oversight and UNHCR and the fact that UNHCR funds all audit activities for the organization. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in New York was currently recruiting the additional auditors, he said, and two field based auditors would soon be placed in West and East Africa.

53. The Director of the Division of Human Resources Management responded that her Division had taken a number of steps to address the issue of consultancies, indicating that every effort is made to identify a suitable UNHCR staff member before a consultant is engaged. She stated that DHRM was also seeking ways to broaden the base of consultants and mechanisms to record the performance of consultants already used by the organization. The Deputy High Commissioner, in clarifying certain aspects, proposed that UNHCR revert with an information paper on the consultancy issue at a future meeting.

X. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

54. The Director of the Europe Operations Bureau, who was appointed Director for Change by the High Commissioner effective 1 September 1997, made a few brief remarks complementing conference room paper EC/47/SC/CRP.54, which contained information on the status of Project Delphi. He indicated that he would focus on prioritizing the change initiatives, ensuring close coordination between the various actors involved in the change process, seeking more active participation in the Project across the board, and accelerating the pace of implementation to bring the process closer to the point of conclusion. Elaborating on this last point, he explained that over the coming months priority would be given to the following areas: design of a Protection Database and Information System; development of the Global Supply Chain; introduction of the Intranet to the field; improvement in communications, both internal and external; a focus on human resource management issues; and the design and development of a new Operations Management System. He stated that if major progress could be achieved in these sectors, the Implementation Plan would have reached an advanced stage. In these circumstances, he hoped that UNHCR would be able to begin the phase out of the framework for managing change, namely Project Delphi.

55. A number of delegations took the floor expressing support for the Director's appointment. Some sought clarification on the issue of delegation of authority to the field. The Director explained that the decentralization of certain functions was envisaged and the delegation of some, rather than full, authority to the field. A number of delegations emphasized the importance of the welfare of staff being kept in mind when undertaking any further post reductions. The Director underlined that staff reductions were

not an objective of Project Delphi; however, it was clear that the streamlining of processes and procedures would result in the need for less staff. Another factor which had an effect on staffing levels was the decrease in the volume of UNHCR activities in the field which would affect the number of staff needed at Headquarters. The Director indicated that staff reductions would be undertaken according to agreed procedures and every effort would be made to minimize the impact on individual staff. In response to a request from one delegation, it was agreed that an oral report on the findings of a consultant examining the issue of outsourcing would be presented to the meeting of the Standing Committee in January 1998. Other comments from delegations included appreciation for the stated intention to bring new impetus into the process, the importance of maintaining the budgets of change projects within reasonable levels, and the need to ensure coordination with other United Nations agencies undertaking reform programmes.

XI. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

56. There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting.